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ABSTRACT

The Lunch at SAMS program--an innovative lunch guest program for seventh graders--is described and evaluated. In this program, conducted at the Selinsgrove Area Middle School (SAMS) in Pennsylvania, adults from the community ate lunch with groups of seventh graders. The focus of the lunch guest program was to increase interaction between students and adults. A representative group of male and female professional and business people as well as individuals associated with the educational community were invited to be luncheon guests. One criterion for choosing guests was that each must be a person who either worked with or were known to have an interest in this age group of students. The session for each group lasted 45 minutes. Students met the guest in the school office, had a conversational lunch at a designated table in the cafeteria for 30 minutes, and spent the remaining 15 minutes in a quiet setting to bring the experience to a close. Twenty-three of the 27 community members who were involved in the program were surveyed; all requested to continue as participants in the program. Six teachers with students in the program were interviewed; all indicated that they felt positively about the program. Results from the survey of the 168 student participants at the conclusion of the program indicated that the program was very positive for them. For example, 66% of the students felt that they would like to participate in Lunch at SAMS again, and 77% of the students felt that seventh graders in the next year's class should get a chance to take part in Lunch at SAMS. Ten data tables are included. (TJH)

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Lunch at SAMS: A Cooperative Community and School Program

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to describe the Lunch at SAMS program, an innovative lunch guest program. In this program adults from the community ate lunch with groups of seventh graders. The focus of the lunch guest program was to increase the interaction among students and adults.

A survey completed by the students at the conclusion of the program indicated that the program was very positive for the students. For example, 66% of the students felt that they would like to participate in Lunch at SAMS again. Seventy-seven percent of the students felt that seventh graders in next year's class should get a chance to take part in Lunch at SAMS.

Lunch at SAMS: A Cooperative School and Community Program

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Lunch at SAMS program, an innovative lunch guest program at the Selinsgrove Area Middle School. In this program adults from the community ate lunch with groups of seven seventh graders. The focus of the lunch guest program was to increase the interaction among students and adults. The team which organized Lunch at SAMS viewed the program as one which would add to the drug and alcohol prevention program of the school district.

A representative group of male and female professional and business people as well as individuals associated with the educational community were invited to be luncheon guests. One criteria for choosing guests was that they were people who either worked with or were known to have an interest in this age group of students. A committee developed a list of guests which included bankers, counselors, law enforcement personnel, school administrators, college faculty and staff, health professionals, clergy, individuals from private industry, senior citizens and social workers.

The session for each group lasted forty-five minutes. The students met the guest in the office, had a conversational lunch at a designated table in the cafeteria for thirty minutes, and spent the remaining fifteen minutes in a quiet setting bringing closure to the experience.

The Selinsgrove Area Middle School is located in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. Selinsgrove is a town in central Pennsylvania located along the Susquehanna River. The school serves 800 students who come from a varicty of socio-economic categories, but the majority of students can be classified as middle class. The school population is approximately 98% white.

Framework

Previous authors such as Gray (1984), Wilson & Rossman (1986), McGrath (1987), Haskvitz (1988), Henderson (1988) and Cetron & Davies (1989) have described successful innovative programs that involve the community at the elementary, middle and high school levels. For example, Gray (1984) discussed the importance of volunteers to a school program. This program in Springfield, Massachusetts used senior citizens to become living sources to augment history and social studies lessons.

Wilson and Rossman (1986) described a program which reduced the "barriers between the school and the neighborhood." One of the successful programs involved the use of retired individuals to assist in the classroom. The program was found to be beneficial to both students and adult volunteers.

McGrath (1987) described a unique reading incentive program that was effective in Springfield, Massachusetts. In this program students read a book and then gave a book report to an adult volunteer from the community. Upon completion of twelve book reports a new book was placed in the school library in honor of the child.

Haskvitz (1988) describes the award winning We Care program.

In the program middle school students used their social studies skills and knowledge to become involved in the community. Their efforts simplified the local voting process and promoted a water conservation program.

Henderson (1988) discusses the importance of parental involvement in the schools and indicated that parent involvement will result in higher student grades, positive student attitudes, improved student behavior and more effective schools.

Cetron and Davies (1989) describe successful schools in Chicago, Indianapolis, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Orangeburg, South Carolina. The authors indicate that a wide variety of programs can be successful in raising student achievement and lowering drop-out rates. However, successful programs usually have these ingredients: dedicated and creative educators, a well run school, and parents who care about educating their children.

Innovative programs can be used to combat the drug problem of our nation. Parents are very concerned about this problem which is best illustrated by the fact that in each year since 1986 Americans have indicated that drug abuse is the number one problem facing the public schools (Elem & Gallup, 1989). Solutions to the drug menace are not easy because there are so many psycho-social causes for the problem. Edwards (1985) indicates that many different and diverse programs are needed to combat the drug and alcohol abuse problem in our country. To combat this problem, the school, community and parents must work together.

Method

Data for this study was collected in several ways. Every seventh grade student (N=168) completed a survey which asked ten questions concerning the Lunch at SAMS program. Personal interviews were conducted by the researchers with six of the teachers who had students in the program. The authors also interviewed 23 of the 27 community members who were involved in the program.

Results

The students' responeses to the survey are found in Tables 1 - 9. The reponses of the students to the ten questions in the survey were very positive. For example, Table 1 illustrates that 66% of the students felt that they would like to participate in Lunch at SAMS again, while only 11% stated that they would not. Another positive indicator is found in Table 3. It illustrates that 64% of the students would like to have lunch with someone more than once during the year. However, 30% of the students did not want to have lunch with someone more than once a year. It is interesting to note that 81% of the students indicated that they would like to eat with a new person if they had a chance to participate in Lunch at SAMS again. (see Table 2)

Further support for the Lunch at SAMS program is evident in Table 4. Seventy-seven percent of the students felt that seventh graders in next year's class should get a chance to have Lunch at SAMS while 20% of the students believed that next year's seventh graders should not have to participate in Lunch at SAMS.

Tables 6, 7 and 8 indicate some of the positive effects of the program. Table 6 contains the student responses to the

question: By eating Lunch at SAMS, will it be easier for you to meet other adults? Sixty percent of the students stated yes, 25% stated no, and 12% were not sure.

Table 7 illustrates that after having Lunch at SAMS, 48% of the students agreed that the community is concerned about them. Sixty-eight percent of the students agreed that adults are there to help them if they need it, and 59% of the students agreed that they are better able to talk with adults. Eleven percent of the students did not respond to the statement.

The students' responses to the question: Were there any good things that happened to you because you had Lunch at SAMS? are contained in Table 8. While 60% stated no or gave no answer, the other students gave a variety of answers that indicate that the program met the needs of some students in a variety of ways. Some of the positive responses were: "I made a new friend.", "I felt good about myself." and "The man says hi to me when I walk home from school." Statements like these indicate that participating in Lunch at SAMS can increase the self-esteem of students.

The students' suggestions for improvement of the program are found in Table 9. Seventeen percent of the students suggested that Lunch at SAMS be longer so that the participants have more time for conversation. Eight percent of the pupils indicated that the lunch should be held in a smaller room.

Six of the teachers who had students involved with the Lunch at SAMS program were interviewed. During the interviews the teachers were asked to comment on the Lunch at SAMS program. A specific set of questions was not used with each teacher. A

content analysis of these interviews is found in Table 10. The content analysis of the teacher interviews revealed positive results as well. All of the teachers interviewed felt positive about the program and 50% indicated the program improved communication between the school and community. They indicated that this increased communication is helpful for the school and students. Teachers are often critical of new programs if they reduce the amount of instructional time. In this case, one teacher stated that the Lunch at SAMS program is "unobtrusive; it does not take away from teaching time."

A content analysis of the community participants' interviews indicated that this was a positive experience for the students as well as themselves and the program should be continued. Increased communication and understanding between adults and students was identified as the greatest outcome of the program. Most felt that additional time with the group of students would be beneficial to establish the idea of a caring adult community. All of the respondents requested to continue as participants in the Lunch at SAMS program.

The principal of the school indicated that the program was very successful. Adults were not too busy to take time out of their day to eat lunch and talk with students. The program provided the students with an opportunity to practice social skills in meeting new people and making conversation. The biggest plus for the school was in public relations. The prinicpal felt that the community participants left the school impressed with the students and pleased with the job the middle school staff was doing in preparing and educating these students.

Discussion

The Lunch at SAMS program is one which can be utilized in middle schools throughout the country. The program is cost effective and is liked by the students, teachers, administration and community participants. While it is only a small part of a drug and alcohol prevention program, it is nevertheless an important one. The conversation between adults and students builds self-esteem in students and gives the adults a feeling for the needs of students in today's society. The program builds bridges between the students and adults in the community and the students have indicated that this experience will help them in their relationship with adults in the future.

It should be noted, however, that this type of program will not improve the self-esteem of all students. Careful inspection of the tables in the appendix will show that not all students were positive about the program. For example, Table 5 indicates that 17% of the students felt great or excited about going to the Lunch at SAMS program that day. Conversely, 4% of the students stated that they felt awful or sick. This confirms a key point in the work of Edwards (1985), who indicated that many different programs are needed to build an effective drug prevention program.

This paper also indicates that while community members may be willing to assist the school, the school itself must usually take the first step and request parent and community involvement. In addition, because of today's complex and busy society, gathering support for a school based program will be easier if

the program has a definite beginning and an end. In this way individuals do not need to worry that they will over-commit themselves.

School personnel also need to remember that community members will be more likely to participate in programs that spark their interest, as well as the interest of students involved in the program. Community members also are more willing to participate when they know or perceive that their efforts will have a positive impact on the youth they will serve. Finally an efficient and well-run program will encourage community support in the future.

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Table 1

Student Response to the Question: Would you like to have Lunch At Sams again?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	110	65.5
No	19	11.3
Not Sure	39	23.2

N=168

Table 2

Student response to the Question: If you were to have Lunch at SAMS again, would you like to eat with the same person or someone new?

Response	Frequency	%
Same Person	22	13.1
New Person	136	80.9
Indifferent	10	6.0

N=168

Table 3

Student Response to the Question: Would you like to have lunch with someone more than once during the year?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	108	64.3
No	50	29.8
Not Sure	10	5.9

N=168

Table 4

Student Response to the Question: Do you think that seventh graders should do this next year?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	130	77.4
No	34	20.2
Not Sure	4	2.4

N=168

Table 5

Student Response to the Question: How did you feel in the morning when you were scheduled to have Lunch at SAMS?

Response	Frequency	%
Same as Usual or OK	43	25.6
Good, Happy, or Proud	39	23.2
Great or Excited	28	16.7
Nervous	25	14.9
Not Sure or No Answer	14	8.3
Awful or Sick	7	4.2
Didn't know I would, They should tell us earlier	5	2.9
Good because I got out of class early	4	2.4
Other	3	1.8

N=168

Table 6

Student Response to the Question: By eating Lunch at SAMS, will it be easier for you to meet other adults?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	101	60.1
No	42	25.0
Not Sure	20	11.9
No Answer	5	3.0

N=168

Table 7

Student Response to the Question: After having Lunch at SAMS, do you feel that: (check as many as you want)

Response	Frequency	%
The community is concerned about you	81	48.2
Adults are there to help you if you need it	114	67.9
You are better able to talk with adults	99	58.9
No answer	18	10.7

N=168

Table 8

Student Response to Question: Were there any good things that happened to you because you had Lunch at SAMS?

Response	Frequency	%
No	78	46.4
No Answer	22	13.1
I got to know the adult better	22	13.1
Yes	22	13.1
I got out of class early	7	4.1
I got to play ping pong	3	1.8
Helped me loosen up around adults	2	1.2
I had a good time	2	1.2
I learned a lot	1	.6
My day went better	1	.6
I became less shy	1	.6
I met other students	1	.6
I made a new friend	1	.6
The man says Hi to me when I walk home from school	1	.6
I felt good about myself	1	.6
I realized that adults care about us	1	.6
I thought adults might like me for what I am	1	.6
I understand the community better	1	.6

N=168

Table 9

Student Response to the Question: What could be done to improve Lunch at SAMS?

Response	Frequency	%
Nothing, or good as is	38	22.6
More time to talk	30	17.8
Have lunch in a smaller room which is quiet	14	8.3
No Answer	15	8.9
Have better food	14	8.3
Let students pick who they want to eat with	10	5.9
Do it more often	8	4.8
Have more students at each lunch	8	4.8
Have better organization	5	1.8
Make it for all students	5	3.0
If kid is absent make sure they get a chance	3	1.8
Let kids have input	3	1.8
Free lunch for kids	5	3.0
Stop it	6	3.6
Give everyone chance to talk	1	.6
Have a centerpiece	1	.6
Don't stop it	1	.6
Others	3	1.8

N=168

Table 10

Teacher Interviews

Category	Frequency
Felt positive about program	6
Guest list should also include senior citizens and the average citizen	2
Lunch at SAMS should be continued next year	2
Kids seemed to enjoy it	2
The building of communication between adults, students, and teachers is good for all of us	3
The program is unobtrusive; it does not take away from teaching	1
Make sure the teacher knows when students will return to class	2
Make sure all kids get a chance to participate	1
It helped students see people in authority as human beings like themselves	1